

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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R 301517Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4654

INFO AMCONGEN ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ADDIS ABABA 6390

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ECON PINS PINT ET

SUBJECT: CURRENT SITUATION IN WELLEGA, ILLUBABOR AND KEFA PROVINCES

REF: A) ADDIS 4774; B) ADDIS 5392

SUMMARY: DURING MAY 18-22 TRIP THROUGH WELLEGA, ILLUBABOR AND KEFA PROVINCES TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS FOUND THE POLITICAL SITUATION APPARENTLY QUITTING DOWN, THE ECONOMY SOMEWHAT DEPRESSED OWING TO LOW COFFEE PRICES AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY OAT OR NEAR NORMAL LEVELS. THE ZEMETCHA WERE WORKING PRIMARILY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FARMERS' ASSOCIATIONS AND THE LAND REFORM MINISTRY HAS PLACED ITS REPRESENTATIVES DOWN AS FAR AS THE WOREDA (SUB-DISTRICT) LEVELS. TWO CHINESE INTERPRETERS ATTACHED TO THE CHINESE MEDICAL TEAM IN JIMMA HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN LOCAL COMMUNITY.

1. TWO EMBASSY OFFICERS TRAVELED THROUGH WELLEGA, ILLUBABOR AND KEFA PROVINCES FROM MAY 18 THROUGH MAY 22. THEIR OBSERVATIONS FOLLOW.

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2. POLITICAL/SECURITY SITUATION

A. WELLEGA PROVINCE, AFTER EXPERIENCING A RATHER SERIOUS BREAKDOWN IN LAW AND ORDER DURING SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, HAS BEEN BASICALLY QUIET SINCE MARCH WHEN NEW ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIALS TOOK OFFICE. DURING THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY AFTER HAILE SELASSIE WAS OVERTHROWN THERE WAS A MAJOR OUTBREAK OF LAWLESSNESS AND 3000 PEOPLE WERE ARRESTED FOR THEFT IN SHAMBU AWRAJA IN TWO WEEKS. LATER, THERE WAS ALSO CONSIDERABLE LANDLORD-ZEMETCHA FRICTION IN THAT AREA WITH RESULTANT POLICE INVOLVEMENT, BUT THAT HAS APPARENTLY CLEARED UP AND THE ZEMATCHOCH WHO WERE TEMPORARILY WITHDRAWN HAVE NOW RETURNED TO THE AREA. LOCAL LANDOWNERS IN SOME AREAS NOW HAVE TO CHECK IN AT POLICE STATIONS THREE TIMES DAY AND IN GENERAL APPEAR TO BE NEUTRALIZED. THEY HAVE LITTLE OR NO LOCAL SUPPORT. NEKEMPTE STUDENTS APPEAR NOT TO BE ACTIVE POLITICALLY.

B. IN ILLUBABOR PROVINCE THE SITUATION IS ALSO GENERALLY QUIET ALTHOUGH THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS IN SOME AREAS BETWEEN THE LANDOWNERS AND THE ZEMETCHA REGARDING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CROP JUST HARVESTED. THE ZEMETCHA CLAIMED THAT THE PEASANTS DID NOT HAVE TO GIVE THE LANDLORD A SHARE OF THE CROP. THE DIVISION OF THE CROP HAD ALREADY TAKEN PLACE BEFORE THE LAND REFORM PROCLAMATION WAS ANNOUNCED, SO THE ZEMETCHA ENCOURAGED THE PEASANTS TO TAKE THEIR IN-KIND PAYMENTS TO THE LANDOWNERS BACK. THE POLICE, ON LEGAL GROUNDS, SUPPORTED THE LANDOWNERS. THE ISSUE WAS APPARENTLY RESOLVED WITH THE LANDOWNERS HAVING TO GIVE IN. DURING THE CONFLICT TWO BALABATS WERE KILLED BY THE PEASANTS. THIRTEEN LANDOWNERS IN METU ARE ALSO REQUIRED TO CHECK IN WITH THE POLICE THREE TIMES DAILY.

C. KEFA PROVINCE, ESPECIALLY AROUND THE JIMMA REGION, HAD PREVIOUSLY EXPERIENCED RATHER SEVERE DISORDERS (SEE REFTELS) BUT THESE WERE RESOLVED IN EARLY MAY. APPARENTLY THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR HAD GIVEN THE ZEMATCHOCH CARTE BLANCHE TO IMPLEMENT ETHIOPIAN SOCIALISM WHICH THEY THEN USED TO EXPROPRIATE ANIMALS AND EQUIPMENT FROM THE BALABATS. THIS RESULTED IN CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ZEMETCHA AND THE PEASANTS ON ONE SIDE AND THE POLICE AND LANDLORDS (MOSTLY AMHARA) ON THE OTHER. AFTER SEVERAL CLASHES, WHICH INVOLVED LOSS OF (30 PEASANTS KILLED) AND PROPERTY THE GOVERNMENT FINALLY RESTORED ORDER BY SENDING THE ZEMETCHA TROUBLEMAKERS (ABOUT 85) TO ADDIS AND RETURNING THE

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OTHER STUDENTS TO THEIR POSTS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, WHOM MOST OBSERVERS BLAME FOR INSTIGATING THE STRIFE, HAS NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO RETURN TO THE PROVINCE FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS. IT IS ALSO WIDELY RUMORED THAT THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR WAS ATTEMPTING TO ORGANIZE THE GALLAS INTO SOME FORM OF OROMO LIBERATION FRONT. TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF REPORTING OFFICERS GALLA AND AMHARA SECONDARY STUDENTS IN JIMMA CLASHED WITH SOME STUDENTS BEING SEVERELY BEATEN. IN

THE SOUTHERN AREA OF THE PROVINCE NEAR THE OMO RIVER THERE IS AN ONGOING CONFLICT BETWEEN THE SHANKILLA TRIBE AND THE KULU TRIBE WHICH HAS ALLEGEDLY RESULTED IN APPROXIMATELY 2500 DEAD. THE SHANKILLA ARE ATTEMPTING TO RECLAIM THEIR ANCIENT TRIBAL LANDS FROM THE KULUS. CONFLICT BETWEEN THESE TWO TRIBES ALSO ERUPTED IN THE PAST. THIS TIME IT WAS PROBABLY CAUSED BY THE LAND REFORM ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE BELIEF THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS TOO OVEREXTENDED TO POLICE THE AREA. AS THE AREA IS ALMOST INACCESSIBLE IT MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BRING THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL. THE PROVINCE IS REPORTEDLY QUIET OTHERWISE ASIDE FROM OCCASIONAL LOCAL DISTURBANCE, USUALLY CAUSED BY LOCAL LANDLORDS. IN ONE RECENT SUCH INCIDENT, TWENTY POLICE WERE REPORTEDLY SENT TO MIZAN TEFARI ON MAY 20 TO SUPPRESS A DISSIDENT EX-GOVERNOR. A MISSIONARY SOURCE WHO KNOWS THE EX-AWRAJA GOVERNOR PERSONALLY STATED THAT HE AND 400 MEN ARE SITUATED ON A MOUNTAIN TOP NEAR SHEWA GEMIRA AND ARE IN OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE AIRFIELD HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN PLOWED UP AND SIM MISSIONARIES HAVE BEEN WITHDRAWN FROM THE AREA. D. RADIO BROADCASTS IN GALLINYA ARE VERY POPULAR IN ALL THREE PROVINCES. SOME OBSERVERS (AMHARA) FEAR THAT THESE BROADCASTS COULD RESULT IN INCREASED TRIBAL CONSCIOUSNESS WHICH WILL TEND TO DIVIDE THE COUNTRY RATHER THAN TO UNITE IT.

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3. ECONOMIC SITUATION

A. ALL THREE PROVINCES HAVE SUFFERED ECONOMICALLY FROM LOW COFFEE PRICES. MANY FARMERS AND SMALL MERCHANTS ARE HOLDING COFFEE HARVESTED LAST YEAR IN THE HOPE THAT PRICES WILL SOON RISE. THE OUTLOOK FOR THIS YEAR'S CROP IS THE BEST IN SEVERAL YEARS. OWING TO POLITICAL UNCERTANTY, DEPOSITS IN BANKS DECLINED AFTER THE NATIONALIZATION ANNOUNCEMENT BUT AR NOW RISING AGAIN MAINLY BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE RELUCTANT TO KEEP CURRENCY IN THEIR HOMES. MERCHANTS ARE NOT REPAYING THEIR LOANS BECAUSE THEY CLAIM BUSINESS ACTIVITY IS OFF BUT THEY ARE ALSO WORRIED ABOUT URBAN LAND REFORM AND MAY PREFER TO REMAIN IN DEBT UNTIL THE SITUATION CLARIFIES. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME PRICE INCREASES BUT NO SERIOUS SHORTAGES OF CONSUMER GOODS.

B. AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY APPEARED TO BE NORMAL OR CLOSE TO IT ALTHOUGH SOME LANDLORDS HAD SOLD THEIR OXEN FOR SLAUGHTER WHICH HAD CAUSED LOCALIZED SHORTAGES OF DRAUGHT ANIMALS FOR PLOWING. CORN, THE PRINCIPAL FOOD GRAIN CROP, WAS OBSERVED IN ALL STAGES OF GROWTH. LAST YEAR'S CROP WAS OFF IN WELLEGA PROVINCE OWING TO LACK OF RAINFALL BUT NO SEVERE SHORTAGES WERE EVIDENT EXCEPT
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FOR A FEW LOCALIZED AREAS IN WESTERN WELLEGA PROVINCE WHERE SOME PEASANTS HAVE ALLEGEDLY DIED OF STARVATION. THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ZEMETCHA ARE TAKING STEPS TO ALLEVIATE THIS PROBLEM, HOWEVER. THE LARGE DIDESSA PROJECT (PLOWING AND PLANTING VIRGIN LAND TO CORN) APPEARED TO BE PROGRESSING WELL WITH CORN ALREADY UP ALONG THE ROAD. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT A DECREASE IN CEREAL PRODUCTION OWING TO THE DISLOCATIONS CAUSED BY LAND REFORM BUT DOUBT THAT IT WILL BE SEVERE.

4. ZEMETCHA

THE ZEMETCHA STUDENTS ARE CONCENTRATING PRIMARILY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FARMERS' ASSOCIATIONS. THEY ALSO APPEAR TO BE PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES AND CONDUCTING LITERACY PROGRAMS, BOTH IN GALLINYA AND OTHER LANGUAGES. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE REPORTS IN ALL THREE PROVINCES OF INITIAL DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING THE PROGRAM STARTED, WHICH SOMETIMES RESULTED IN BLOODSHED, MOST OBSERVERS AGREED THAT THE PROGRAM WAS PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY AT PRESENT ALGHOUGH THEY EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE VIABILITY OF THE PEASANTS' ASSOCIATIONS.

5. LAND REFORM

ASIDE FROM SETTING UP FARMERS' ASSOCIATION NOTED ABOVE NO LAND REFORM ACITIVITES HAVE TAKEN PLACE AS YET. IN CONTRAST TO THE CASE IN GOJJAM AND BEGEMDIR, THE LAND REFORM MINISTRY HAS REPRESENTATIVES DOWN TO THE WOREDA (SUB-DISTRICT) LEVEL

IN THESE PROVINCES. IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO DETERMINE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.

6. CHINESE ACTIVITIES

TWO CHINESE INTERPRETERS ATTACHED TO THE CHINESE MEDICAL TEAM (23 MEMBERS) IN JIMMA HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY WITH TWO OR THREE LEFTIST TEACHERS IN THE JIMMA SECONDARY SCHOOL. THEY HAVE SHOWN FILMS, PASSED OUT LITERATURE, AND INVITED TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO THEIR HOMES FOR DISCUSSIONS. THE REST OF THE CHINESE DO NOT FRATERNIZE WITH ETHIOPIANS AND HAVE TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM THEIR EMBASSY IN ADDIS TO ACCEPT INVITATIONS, WRITTEN MATERIAL, ETC.

7. COMMENT. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT PARA 6 OF ADDIS ABABA'S CONFIDENTIAL

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4601 ACTUALLY REFERRED TO SITUATION IN ARJO AWRAJA, APPROXIMATELY 50 MILES SOUTH OF NEKEMPTE. A SEPARATE GENERALLY RELIABLE SOURCE, A NATIVE OF ARJO, WHO RETURNED FROM THERE LAST WEEK REPORTED THAT THE ZEMETCHA HAS COMPLETELY TAKEN OVER THAT AWRAJA AND WERE FUNCTIONING AS ADMINISTRATORS, JUDGES, JURIES AND OCCASIONALLY AS EXECUTIONERS. WHILE IN NEKEMPTE REPORTING OFFICERS DISCUSSED LOCAL SITUATION WITH US CITIZEN MISSIONARIES LOCATED IN COUNTRYSIDE, COMMERCIAL BANK GENERAL MANAGER, USIS READING ROOM ASSISTANT SUPERVISOR, AND MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE OFFICIAL, AMONG OTHERS, AND WE RECEIVED NO INDICATIONS OF PROBLEMS IN THAT REGION. ALL, IN FACT, AGREED THAT THE SITUATION IN NEKEMPTE REGION HAS BEEN BASICALLY QUIET IN RECENT MONTHS WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE SHAMBU REGION.
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